

May 25, '77

Dear R.,

You wrote about your aversion when other people talk about Krishnamurti who stresses to be with nature. You have aversion when people point out to you beautiful things like sunsets, trees and birds. You think that if one encourages dwelling on beautiful things one develops attachment which is a cause of sorrow later on when one does not have these things anymore. However, how can one stop kusala vipāka, you write. You are wondering what to do about your aversion. And you wonder what is useful to do and what not when one is leading a lay life.

I have had aversion when people pointed out to me sunsets, flowers and fruits. Then there is lack of patience and consideration for others. During our trip in Sri Lanka we talked a great deal of such problems. I found it helpful to be reminded of different aspects of akusala, and also of different ways of cultivating kusala. Not only vipassanā, but also dāna, sīla and moments of calmness, samatha.

We are bound to have aversion when things are not as we want them to be. When people are not as we would like them to be, when they talk about things which we do not like. The problem is with ourselves, not with the others. Where is our patience at such moments? Where the mettā and karuṇā we have read so much about? When we have mettā and karuṇā, there is no attachment, we do not have to be afraid to be attached. And there is no aversion. When we try to flee things of beauty, we are cultivating non-attachment in the wrong way, without right understanding. Right there and then when we are with people there is an opportunity to cultivate mettā and karuṇā. Khun Sujin reminded me that it is kusala to be considerate for the other people's feelings. They like Krishnamurti and it is better to let them talk about what they want. The Buddha said that we have to speak at the right time, not at the wrong time. Khun Sujin pointed this out to me many times. I like to hurry and speak at once about the Dhamma, but it may not be helpful, it may be the wrong time. I am so attached to talking about Dhamma. Khun Sujin said: "We apply Dhamma, also when we do not speak about Dhamma." We have to cultivate patience.

Khun Sujin also said that it is very strong attachment which conditions dosa. It must be very strong when it conditions dosa. I found this a very helpful reminder. I am so attached to pleasant sounds. As soon as I hear loud sounds I have aversion.

So, all the time when there are things which are not the way we would like them to be there is bound to be aversion, conditioned by strong attachment. It is a real, good warning. It can remind us to cultivate just a moment later kusala, be it dāna, sīla, calmness or vipassanā.

We may think it noble that we do not want pleasant objects,

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but we have attachment anyway. There are still conditions for attachment. You said that one cannot stop kusala vipāka. One cannot stop attachment either, when there are conditions for it. If it is not attachment to sunsets, then it is attachment to our eye, or to seeing. Do we wish to part with an eye and lack the ability to see? We have attachment to our body, to health, many, many objects of attachment. We have attachment to self, it is our aversion, our attachment, our nāma and rūpa. Also conceit is a form of attachment. We may think that we have more understanding than our friends.

We cannot stop attachment from arising, but when we see the disadvantage of akusala, it is a condition that more kusala will be cultivated instead of akusala. It is right understanding which sees the value of kusala, all kinds of kusala. Not only vipassanā. Right awareness does not arise all the time. When it is not time for vipassanā, it may be time for other forms of kusala. It depends on the citta which arises, we cannot select any form of kusala, but we should not despise mettā and karuṇā, for instance.

In Sri Lanka we talked about pleasing others. I used to think that that is lobha. But it can also be kusala. Kindness and consideration for other people's feelings, gentleness in speech, these are ways of pleasing others which are kusala. We can talk about gardens and nature with kusala cittas. For instance, the phrase 'What a beautiful sunset' can be said with lobha, but also with kindness. If some people are so kind to take us out and like us to have pleasant objects, is it not lack of consideration for their feelings and lack of gratefulness if we just look with aversion and a sullen face? Aversion shows on our face. When I talked about this with Maud, she said: 'I know it only too well. The corners of the mouth go down, one has a set expression.' Is that agreeable for others?

When I am now being entertained at a party and the conversation is not about matters which interest me, I remember not to show an unkind face. I remember how inconsiderate and disagreeable that must be for the host and hostess. I see more the value of considerateness, even in very small things. It is also in such circumstances that one has to apply Dhamma.

You say that you keep quiet now when there is talk about nature, but, as Khun Sujin also asked me: Do you keep quiet with kusala or with aversion? It is so helpful to consider the different moments of citta. I learnt again: there are so many different realities within a short period of time and how much there is still to be known. This can remind us to 'study' more, with mindfulness.

Different people may talk about nature. The same words can be said with kusala citta or with akusala citta. It does not matter whether the subject is nature or not, it depends on the citta.

I read in the Theragāthā about arahats talking about nature.

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In the Theragāthā (CXIII) we read about the arahat Vanavaccha. His relatives wanted him to stay near them, but he preferred to live in solitude. He uttered the verse:

Crag where clear waters lie, a rocky world,  
Haunted by black-faced apes and timid deer,  
Where 'neath bright blossoms run the silver streams:  
Those are the highlands of my heart's delight.

He had of course no attachment to nature, but he used these words to express his preference of solitude, he wanted to be independent of other people.

We read in the Theragāthā (CCLXI) about Mahā Kassapa who even at a high age climbed a mountain every day. He also spoke about nature:

Those upland glades delightful to the soul,  
Where the kareri spreads its wildering wreaths,  
Where sound the trumpet-calls of elephants:  
Those are the braes wherein my soul delights.

He speaks about the dark blue clouds, the crystal-clear water (do you have aversion already?), but he uses nature to express that he is completely free, free from defilements. We read at the end of the poem: that what brings him delight is the 'perfect vision of the Dhamma'.

Looking at a sunset can condition moments of quiet if one looks with right understanding of the characteristic of calmness.

Thinking of the impermanence of things may condition calmness. How fast the colours change. Or looking at flowers: how fast they wither. Or when there is more right understanding of seeing as only an element which experiences visible object and of visible object as only that which appears through the eyes, nobody in it, no flower, no animal in it, there may be a moment of right awareness. When the characteristic of aversion appears it can be known as only a conditioned reality, not my aversion. When we think and talk about it as 'my aversion' it makes it worse.

When we think: aversion is conditioned, it is only conditioned, it may also be akusala citta which thinks. We may find it a nice excuse that it is conditioned and forget to cultivate all kinds of kusala.

When the day ends with a sunset and when the day begins with a sunrise it may remind you of the cycle of birth and death. How fast the days fly by. This may remind you of being mindful right then and there, as the only way to be freed from dukkha.

What is useful to do as a layman: all kinds of kusala. We cannot direct citta to then this kind then that kind of kusala, it depends on the moment. And if we speak to others, about Dhamma, it can only be helpful if we speak with kusala citta, not with aversion or conceit. This is very difficult. Kusala citta should know when

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it is the right time to speak about Dhamma.

Some people may want to become a monk in order to flee all these conversations they do not like. They think that they have very little attachment to things. But if the motive for becoming a monk is aversion, is that the right motive? One may become a monk because one thinks that one truly has accumulations for this kind of life, but it is essential to know oneself very well. One should not mislead oneself and think that one has very little attachment. If one truly has the accumulations for monkhood and one thinks that one can help many other people in that way, helping them to know Dhamma, the events in one's life will lead one to monkhood. But it should not be a flight, with aversion.

Phra Dhammadharo said that one should develop patience with people and without there being people. It should not matter too much whether there are people around or not. When there is mindfulness one lives truly alone, Khun Sujin said. There are no beings, only realities which appear one at a time through the six doors.

Let me know whether you have less aversion now,

Nina.